



**PATIENT FEEDBACK ON EXPERIENCES OF
REMOTE CONSULTATIONS & DIGITAL
PRESCRIPTIONS**

July 2020

Context

Healthwatch Sutton is the people's champion for health and social care in the London Borough of Sutton. An independent organisation, we are set up to ensure the voice of local people is heard in the planning, delivery and monitoring of local health and care services.

As part of our work Healthwatch Sutton is commissioned, by NHS Sutton, to carry out specific work around supporting and empowering a Borough wide Patient Reference Group (PRG) made up of volunteer patient representatives from Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) at GP practices. The majority of Sutton practices are represented at this Forum.

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures and social distancing presented challenges, in terms of patient engagement, restricting the usual opportunities to hold face to face meetings, to gather the views and experiences of local people.

In May 2020 we proposed a small piece of work, that was agreed, to carry out an exercise to capture patient experiences to provide a 'snapshot' of patient experiences of some services that could be used to:

- help inform the delivery of general practice in the future
- add some detail to our patient survey for [Transforming Primary Care](#) ("Changing Your GP Service")
- offer any insight that could form the basis of a wider piece of work in the future

What we set out to do

1. To capture views and feedback specifically on recent experiences of

A REMOTE CONSULTATION - with a GP (or other healthcare professional) - any alternative to a 'face to face' consultation e.g. email, telephone, video call, webchat

AN ELECTRONIC PRESCRIPTION - a new or repeat that prescription that replaces a paper one and is signed and sent electronically to a nominated pharmacy.

2. To capture patient experience at a time when services were changing to accommodate new ways of working
3. To engage with patients using email and telephone
4. To use existing engagement mechanisms; the Patient Reference Group and its member's respective Patient Participation Groups
5. Present a summary of the report and findings to the Patient Reference Group in September 2020
6. Share our findings more widely

What we did

In June 2020 we asked members of the PRG to share our work and asked members of patient groups and Healthwatch Sutton volunteers to provide us with any feedback on recent experiences (their own or that of someone they know) of Digital Prescriptions and Remote Consultations at their GP practice.

(Experiences in other healthcare settings and outside Sutton could be included where the feedback was considered relevant to any setting.)

Patients were also able to provide the name of their surgery to capture examples of positive patient experience

Patients were offered different ways to provide their feedback

- 9 Completed a feedback form and attached to an email
- 10 Provided responses in the body of an email using the feedback form as a guide
- 6 Provided feedback over the phone to the HWS Patient Engagement Officer
- 0 patients opted to provide feedback via Zoom

We received 25 responses to our questions asking people for feedback on positive experiences any negative experiences, any observations or suggestions on ways the experience could have been improved and using the service again.

- 8 people told us about an experience of digital prescribing
- 11 people told us about their experience of a remote consultation
- 5 people told us about their experience of a remote consultation combined with a digital prescription
- 1 person provided feedback on using remote consultations in general
- 1 person provided feedback on a positive experience of GP service during 'lockdown'

What patients told us

DIGITAL PRESCRIPTIONS

What was positive about the experience?

- A simple, easy and straightforward process
- Health issue addressed quickly and efficiently
- Helped not having to go into the surgery (general and coronavirus concerns)
- A more efficient use of my time and GPs
- Helpful for carers
- Provided reassurance that I could get advice and treatment 'as normal'
- The links between practices and pharmacies worked well

What, if anything, was negative about the experience?

- One person reported a duplicate prescription when they changed nominated pharmacy to help carer, but said it wasn't a problem
- One person reported medicine prescribed wasn't delivered as advised -frustrating and time wasted chasing. - (not a Sutton GP/Pharmacy)

Is there anything that could have improved the experience?

- All were satisfied with the process and made no additional suggestions

Would you use this service again?

- All who responded to this question would use again
- Others identified they would now sign up for online prescriptions so they would not need to rely on paper ones again in future

REMOTE CONSULTATIONS

What was positive about the experience?

All remote consultations

- Not having to go to the surgery (Covid- 19 related and general)
- Not having to worry about parking at the surgery
- Not having to travel when unwell
- Not having to arrange childcare or take children to surgery
- More efficient and time saving for patient and GP
- Well managed by the practice
- Prompt call backs from GPs
- Got appointments quickly (current?)
- Clear and concise, no different to face to face
- Reassuring to have this contact with a GP
- Able to progress treatment for a health issue quickly and efficiently
- Virtual GP able to progress referrals and arrange appointment during consultation (virtual)
- Able to show skin problem using camera with help from relative (virtual)

What, if anything, was negative about the experience and how could this be changed or improved?

Telephone

- 10 mins on the phone was not long enough for follow up on admittance to hospital
- I feel more able to express myself 'face to face' than on the end of a telephone line
- I prefer to see my own doctor who understands the situation.
- If you do not see the person with the symptoms how can you give a judgement on what is wrong
- Practice called on mobile, reception was poor, frustrating. Would have preferred a video call
- Not knowing what to do if call doesn't come through on time (GP running late)
- Still took a long time to get through on the phone to arrange telephone consultation

- Telephone consultation ESTH - not with one of the usual consultants and was much more impersonal than a face to face or even possibly a facetime consultation. Appointment was over 2 hours late and lasted around 5 minutes which did not give a chance to ask any questions
- My friend would have preferred to be offered a specific time or timeframe for GP call back, very restricting as needed to ensure outside to receive mobile signal and he has long term mental health issues so he found the waiting very stressful.

Video call

- Practice didn't advise in advance that I needed to download app, reception should notify to give people time to download an app
- Practice didn't advise in advance that a telephone call could be converted into video call, let people know this available so they are prepared.
- Couldn't hear GP very well, both parties need to ensure IT works well and they know how to use it

Additional comments

- Knowing the issues that I have accessing utilities online on behalf of someone who doesn't use IT how would remote consultations work where someone needs a carer or neighbour to help?
- I would like to be able to email the surgery but feel the practice think that patients would bother them too much if that was available. It would enable me to leave my doctor a message rather than speaking to them when they want an update.
- 2 telephone consultations with Oncology consultants based at Royal Marsden, consultations were positive, subsequent negatives were that the paperwork confirming future appointments did not arrive
- My daughter isn't being offered an NHS consultant at the moment so I am paying for her to have a private consultation. GP support has been excellent in the meantime
- Hopefully remote consultations will help cut down on the number of 'appointments' with a GP just for a chat?

A sample of the responses we received

“At all times and with whomsoever I was interacting the experience was excellent.”

“All arranged by phone with GP and consultant, medication arrived at chemist. Could not have gone more easily. But that’s Shotfield Medical practice for you ”

“A pat on the back for Old Court House Surgery, with their no-hassle, simple solution to my prescription problem”

“During my video call GP referred me to a consultant, spoke to consultant and arranged an appointment for me then and there, in 2 days’ time”

“A telephone consultation is an excellent alternative to the standard method of consultation with a GP.”

“I feel that if I cannot see a doctor face to face I may just as well google my concerns for advice”

“GP called back and converted call into a video link. Weird but helpful”

“My surgery wrote to me with regard to my particular health needs at this difficult time. I found it very moving that they should be caring for me so thoughtfully”

*“Initial call to surgery, diagnosis, request for electronic prescription and delivery of medicine all done in 1 day!
Wrythe Green Surgery has risen to the needs of patients”*

Opportunities

Overall our findings, despite the small group and the limitations of the demography, offer a useful insight into recent patient experience which is reflected elsewhere in Healthwatch work.

Potential opportunities that arise from the feedback gathered is also reflected in reporting by Sir Robert Francis, Chair of Healthwatch England;

- Communicate and ensure patients have access to information on what is available
- “Go digital but not by default”, whilst overall feedback is generally positive, identifying benefits and advantages, for some people and in some instances greater use of technology presents barriers and challenges
- Technology and processes that work for GP practices may not be what works best for patients
- Patient feedback is key to take forward the learning from the changes that have been introduced

With particular reference to remote and virtual consultations;

“The reality is that for many, remote and virtual consultations are the only options at the moment so it is important we continue to hear from people about whether it is actually working for them or not and what support is needed to ensure people feel confident to receive healthcare in this way” - *The Doctor will Zoom You Now*”, a *Study in Partnership with Traverse, National Voices and Healthwatch England*

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the PRG members for participating and disseminating our request for feedback to their PPGs and to all who took time out to tell us about their experiences

References

Healthwatch England, Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair of Healthwatch England <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/blog/2020-07-14/covid-19-how-your-experiences-during-pandemic-can-help-nhs>

The Doctor Will Zoom You Now was a rapid, qualitative research study designed to understand the patient experience of remote and virtual consultations. The project was led in partnership with Traverse, National Voices and Healthwatch England and supported by PPL. <https://traverse.ltd/recent-work/blogs/dr-will-zoom-you-now-getting-most-out-virtual-health-and-care-experience>